

PLATO AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

A Study in Fourth-Century Life and Thought

G. C. Field

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his Contemporaries

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LIFE AND THOUGHT

by

G. C. FIELD

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended to serve as a preliminary or supplementary essay to a study of the philosophy of Plato. It deals with some of the problems that arise in connection with Plato, which cannot be treated fully in a work of ordinary size devoted to the interpretation of his philosophy. I have discussed in it problems connected with Plato's life and personality, and also many critical questions, most obviously the Socratic question, which are involved in such an interpretation. I have also attempted an account of the background, historical, literary and philosophical, against which Plato developed his thought and produced his writings. The presupposition of the treatment is the view, which I have expounded in the course of it, that Plato's chief interest in all his activities lay in his own age and its problems. If this is true, it is clear that some knowledge of these points is essential or at least highly desirable for an attempt to understand his philosophy.

The book is, therefore, intended primarily for the student of Plato and of Greek thought in general, for very much the same kind of public, that is to say, as that whose needs are served by Professor Taylor's *Plato*. I hope, however, that it may not be entirely without interest for the more specialized scholar, even though he would probably find little in it with which he was not already familiar. It is partly for his sake that I have added certain appendices and notes at the end of chapters, which summarize in a convenient form the sources and evidence for certain points of view that I have adopted. But for the student also it may be of interest to see how the thing is done, and not merely to be presented with results which give no insight into the processes by which they have been reached. The two last appendices are reprinted with some alterations from the *Classical Quarterly*.

In the numerous illustrative extracts that I have quoted from various authors I have, with some hesitation, made my own translation in every case, even where a satisfactory translation already existed. I made this decision partly for consistency's

sake, as in a good many cases I had to make my own translation, as none existed in English. But I was also influenced by a belief that the translator of illustrative extracts should be guided by somewhat different principles from the translator of a complete work, and might allow himself liberties to paraphrase which would be out of place for the other. With regard to the transliteration of Greek names I have followed throughout what I believe to be the main current of English literary tradition and latinized every name. It seems to me that "Thucydides" is as much correct English for *Θουκυδίδης* as "Athens" is for *Ἀθῆναι*.

There are doubtless many omissions for which the work might be criticized. But I may try to anticipate criticism by mentioning two of them of which I am conscious myself. I have said nothing about the religious background of Plato's time, not because I think it unimportant but because there seems so very little that can profitably be said, at any rate in a work of this kind. The subject is still so obscure that it could only be treated in a way which would not be easy to fit in to the general lines of this book. A more serious criticism would be that I have not dealt, except incidentally, with the scientific and mathematical background. I omitted these because adequate treatment of them seems to me to need more specialized knowledge than I possess of these sciences themselves, particularly of mathematics. In such allusions as I have had to make to mathematical questions, though I have consulted other authors, I have, in general, trusted to the guidance of Sir Thomas Heath.

This brings me to the question of my obligations to other writers. I have taken ideas and information where I found them, and should probably find it impossible, even if there were any need for it, to indicate all my sources. It is very likely that there is hardly a point made in the book which has not already been made by some one else before me. Naturally enough there have been many occasions on which I arrived at a conclusion independently before I found that I had been anticipated in it by a previous writer. But this is a fact of little importance. When I was conscious of a special obligation to any particular author or authors for the subject matter of any particular chapter I have indicated it in the text. For the rest, I must be content with a general acknowledgement of my debt to other writers, which I would couple, to a special degree, with the names of Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Constantin

Ritter, John Burnet, and A. E. Taylor. I should like to emphasize particularly my profound sense of obligation to these last two, because on one central point, which is continually arising in the course of the book, I have been unable to follow them. Because of their well-deserved influence in English Platonic studies, the point must be prominent in any treatment of the subject by an English writer, and I have felt it necessary to revert to it on several occasions. This might give the impression that my attitude to these two great scholars was simply one of critical hostility. But if I could only put all I have learned from them by the side of the few points on which I have had to differ from them, the full absurdity of such an impression would be manifest.

It is even more difficult to single out what I owe to conversations and discussions with many friends. I cannot pass over in silence the help given me by my colleagues in the department of Classics in this university, who have always ungrudgingly put their scholarship at my disposal. My wife has read the whole book in manuscript and discussed many points in it with me, and she has, in addition, taken on her shoulders a great part of the troublesome clerical work involved in preparing such a volume for publication.

January, 1930

G. C. FIELD

PREFACE TO THE 1967 EDITION

THE only difference between this edition and earlier ones lies in the correction of a few misprints and references.

From more recent literature on the topics dealt with in this book the following books and articles deserve special mention:

W. BURKERT, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft: Studien zu Pythagoras, Philolaos und Platon*. Nuremberg: Hans Carl, 1962.

H. CHERNISS, *The Riddle of the Early Academy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945.

V. DE MAGALHAËS-VILHENA, *Le problème de Socrate and Socrate et la légende platonicienne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952.

C. J. DE VOGEL, 'The present state of the Socratic problem', in *Phronesis*, I, 1955, pp. 26-35.

L. EDELSTEIN, *Plato's Seventh Letter*. Leiden: Brill, 1966.

O. GIGON, *Kommentar zum ersten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*. Basel: Reinhardt, 1953.

O. GIGON, *Kommentar zum zweiten Buch von Xenophons Memorabilien*. Basel: Reinhardt, 1956.

K. R. POPPER, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Vol. I (4th edn.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.

SIR W. D. ROSS, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*. Oxford, 1951.

R. SIMETERRE, *Introduction à l'étude de Platon*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1948.

Professor Field's *The Philosophy of Plato* (Oxford, 1951) is a valuable complement to this present study of the background of Plato's thought.

N. G.

CONTENTS

PART I

PLATO'S LIFE AND WORK

CHAP.		PAGE
I	THE LIFE OF PLATO: EARLY YEARS	I
II	PLATO'S LATER LIFE: PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	14
III	THE ACADEMY	30
IV	THE WRITINGS OF PLATO	49
V	THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE DIALOGUES	64

PART II

THE MORAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

VI	THE GENERAL MORAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND	77
VII	THE GENERAL MORAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND (<i>continued</i>)	91
VIII	THE FOURTH CENTURY	107
IX	PLATO ON CONTEMPORARY POLITICS	122

PART III

THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

X	THE SOCRATIC LITERATURE	133
XI	THE SOCRATIC LITERATURE (<i>continued</i>).	146
XII	THE SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHERS	158
XIII	THE PYTHAGOREANS	175
XIV	PLATO ON HIS CONTEMPORARIES	188

APPENDICES

I	THE PLATONIC LETTERS	197
II	ARISTOTLE'S ACCOUNT OF THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE THEORY OF IDEAS	202
III	SOCRATES AND PLATO IN POST-ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION	214
	INDEX OF AUTHORS QUOTED	239
	GENERAL INDEX	241

PART I

PLATO'S LIFE AND WORK

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF PLATO

EARLY YEARS

NO philosophic writer of past ages has such permanent interest and value as Plato. We ought to read him primarily for the help that he can give to our own philosophical thinking. That is certainly what he himself would have wished. But behind his writings we get glimpses of a personality, which must arouse the interest and curiosity of the narrowest philosophical specialist. Furthermore, even for the understanding of his philosophical arguments some knowledge of his life and surroundings is essential. These arguments mean much more to us if we can form a picture of the circumstances in which they were used, and the situation that was in the mind of the philosopher himself in using them. Historical research, then, into Plato's life and the circumstances of his time, has a value for philosophy as well as a value as history, for its own sake. And time spent on it by the philosopher is not wasted, as long as he avoids two dangers. In the first place, he must reconcile himself to the fact that there is a great deal which we should like to know, but cannot possibly know, and he must learn to draw the line between reasonable conjectures and idle speculation which is merely waste of time. And secondly, and more seriously, he must stand up against the tendency to pay too much attention to history, to describe Plato and his philosophy as merely the product of the circumstances of his time, and to forget

how much of this philosophy arises from reflection on realities which are the same in all ages.

What do we know of Plato's life? It has often been noticed how the Greek idea of biography differs from our own. It is curious that the Greeks, who invented the scientific study of history, seem to have had so little idea of applying their historical methods to the biographies of individual persons. Even the best of them seem to write for edification rather than for truth. And in the average biography, when we are looking for an account of the events of the life, we find only strings of anecdotes and incidental comments, with little or no chronological connection and no coherent thread running through them.

This is particularly apparent in the extant biographies of Plato. It is true that we have lost a good deal of material that might have told us more. We should learn a good deal from the writings of the Middle Comedy if they had survived. From the few quotations that have come down to us we can tell that Plato, at any rate in his later years, was a favourite subject of theirs. Then after his death Speusippus, his nephew and successor, wrote an *Encomium of Plato*, which might have told us something more, though the only 'fact' for which he is quoted as an authority by later writers is the story that Plato was really the son of Apollo. Hermodorus, another disciple of Plato, wrote a book on the Socratics, which was probably of more value than the work of Speusippus. It is quoted once by Diogenes as his authority for an interesting fact, and once at third-hand by Simplicius for information about Plato's philosophical teaching. Yet, even if we had this and other lost material it is doubtful whether it would tell us very much more about the things that we most want to know. For instance, one of the things that we should be most glad to have would be a single reliable date for the composition of any of the dialogues. Yet it appears likely that not even among the writings of his immediate successors was such information to be found. For later writers, who had access to these works, on the one or two occasions on which they mention such a matter at all, can only quote popular opinions based on inferences from the character of some one of the dialogues. And very foolish inferences they are.

We have, of course, one great piece of good fortune in the preservation of some of Plato's own letters. From the most important of these, we are very well informed about even the

details of one chapter in Plato's later life, his second and third visits to Syracuse. And in one of them there is a brief piece of autobiography, describing the growth of Plato's opinions on certain matters and his impressions of certain events in his earlier life. This is of inestimable value, and affords almost the only certain basis of our knowledge. For the rest we have to turn to the biographers. The earliest of those is Apuleius, better known, as he would probably be horrified to hear, as the author of the *Golden Ass*. He dates from the middle of the second century A.D. At the end of that century or at the beginning of the next comes Diogenes Laertius, whose *Lives of the Philosophers*, third-rate production as it is, still remains one of our most important authorities for many points in the history of Greek philosophy. From the sixth century A.D. comes the life by Olympiodorus, and an anonymous life is probably of about the same period. These various lives have a great deal in common and were probably based on much the same authorities. That by Diogenes is the fullest, and is also of more value than the rest in that it often quotes the earlier authorities for the statements made. Added to these we have a few anecdotes in Cicero, Plutarch, Aelian, Athenaeus and other late authors, and that is all.

Even the date of Plato's birth is not entirely certain. Apollodorus, the chronologist of the second century B.C., put it in 428-427 B.C. And that date has been generally accepted, though Apollodorus' methods of calculation are not always above suspicion. There was, however, another version preserved by later writers which put the date two or three years earlier. The discrepancy, however, is not of great importance. The date generally given for his death is 347. The disputes about his precise age at his death, referred to by Diogenes, probably arose from the different versions of the date of his birth. All his earlier life was thus passed under the shadow of the Peloponnesian War. He saw the downfall and partial recovery of his own city, the rise and fall of Sparta, the rise of Thebes, and his death came just as the growing power of Philip of Macedon was beginning to concentrate on itself the hopes or the fears of far-seeing men.

About his family we are more certainly informed. He was the son of Ariston and Perictione, both of whom traced their descent back to distinguished ancestors. Ariston, evidently of an extremely ancient line, traced his descent to Codrus, who was, according to the legend, the last king of Athens.

Perictione's family came down from Solon, who as an ancestor, if some centuries later than Codrus, had at least the advantage of having really existed. Thus on either side Plato was of ancient and noble lineage. He was not the only child. Of his two brothers, familiar to readers of the *Republic*, Adeimantus and Glaucon, certainly one and probably both were considerably older than Plato.¹ There was also a sister, Potone, whose son, Speusippus, afterwards succeeded Plato in the headship of the Academy. It would be natural to place her birth in the considerable interval between that of Plato and that of his next brother, so that we are probably justified in thinking of him as considerably the youngest member of the family. We are safe in dismissing as a fiction the story, which still finds its way into some modern writings, that his name was originally Aristocles and that Plato was given him as a nickname on account of some distinctive physical feature.² The evidence for it is of the slightest, and Plato was a regular Athenian name. Of the brothers we know practically nothing beyond the attractive picture given of them as young men in the *Republic*. We know that Adeimantus, at any rate, was alive in 399. But there is no other record of what happened to them or of what they did. Perictione married a second time and lived to a very great age. Plato writes as if expecting her death in a letter dating some time about 366. If the view adopted here of the age of Plato's brothers is correct, she must have been over ninety then.

There is a slight impression left from reading Plato's own writings that some of his other relations, such as his uncle Charmides and Critias, stood for more in his life than either his parents or his brothers. These were among the men who became notorious as the authors of the oligarchic *coup d'état* and the White Terror which followed the close of the Peloponnesian War. It has been argued from this that Plato's birth and family connections would from the first incline him to the anti-democratic side. As against this,

¹ The evidence is conflicting. Xenophon certainly speaks in the *Memorabilia* as if Glaucon were younger than Plato. But he is often careless about such details. And if Burnet and Taylor are right—and to me their arguments seem absolutely decisive—in placing the dramatic date of the *Republic* somewhere about 421, it is evident that Glaucon, who had already seen service in the field by then, must have been at least thirteen or fourteen years older than Plato.

² It is amusing to note that the authors who gave currency to the story could not apparently agree as to what the feature was.

Burnet has pointed out that the earlier affiliations of his family appear to have been rather with the Periclean democracy and that it was only late in the war that Critias and Charmides became prominent members of the oligarchic party. Such a development was characteristic of the time. The rich and noble families which had accepted the Periclean régime and been proud to serve it, seem to have been driven in increasing numbers into the ranks of the extreme opponents of democracy by the financial oppression to which they were subjected to pay for the war policy of the democratic party. At any rate it is clear that during the susceptible years in which Plato was first coming to manhood those most near to him were becoming more and more hostile to the democracy and ready to go to any length to overthrow it.

We have, naturally, no reminiscences of Plato's childhood, though from his own dialogues we can get glimpses of what a boy's life in Athens could be like. There are stories of an early interest in painting and poetry, which are probable enough, though not based on evidence of any value. The well-known story of how on meeting Socrates he burnt the plays that he had been writing and from henceforth devoted himself to philosophy may be safely rejected. There is too much of the story with a moral about it, and incidentally it does not altogether tally with what we can conjecture of his relations with Socrates. What these were we must consider directly. But there is one more occupation of his youth and early manhood which it is worth while mentioning. From the age of eighteen till the end of the war about five years later he must have been fairly continuously occupied in military service. It is a probable conjecture that a youth of his wealth¹ and family would be qualified for service in the cavalry, and, as a corollary of this, that most, if not all, of these years of service were passed in Attica. For the special duty of the cavalry during the last years of the war was to watch for and when possible repel the Spartan raiding parties from the fort at Deceleia.

It is very unlikely, however, that this was Plato's last experience of military service. For when Athens was once more involved in war in 395 he was still of an age which might make him liable to be called up if required. Service at this time would be beyond the boundaries of Attica. We can read

¹ The question of Plato's financial position is disputed. But on the whole the evidence is in favour of regarding him as a rich man.

in the speech that Lysias wrote for a certain Mantitheus of how the cavalry were ordered to reinforce their new allies, the Thebans, at Haliartus, where Lysander met his death, and of how again the same troopers had to ride to Corinth a year later to make head against Agesilaus. There is an account that comes from Aristoxenus and is recorded, though certainly in a garbled form, by Diogenes,¹ which would lead us to suppose that it was precisely in those expeditions that Plato took part. It was said, even, that on one of these occasions he was decorated for valour in the field. This, however, is to anticipate. What is important to remember is that an Athenian philosopher in Plato's time could not be a mere cloistered scholar but had to know what it was like to be a man of action too. The present generation of scholars in our own country who gave service in the great war will be able to estimate the difference that this must have made to their understanding of many problems.

To return to the earlier years of Plato's manhood, there still remain the two most important influences in his life, upon which we have not yet touched, his political interests and his friendship with Socrates. And it is on these points that we are in a position to call Plato himself as evidence.

'As a young man,' he tells us in the Seventh Letter written when he himself was well over seventy, 'I went through the same experience as many others; I thought that, the very moment I became my own master, I should devote myself to public affairs. And by the hazard of politics a chance of this offered itself to me. For the existing constitution became an object of abuse to many people so that a change took place . . . and thirty rulers were set up with supreme powers. Some of these happened to be relatives and friends of mine, and they at once called on me to join in this as my proper work. And, as was not surprising for one of my age, I felt that they would lead the city from an evil to a righteous way of life and govern it accordingly. So I paid great attention to what they would do. But I saw that in a little time their behaviour had made the former constitution seem a golden age by comparison. For among other crimes, there was their treatment of Socrates, a dearly-loved older friend of mine, whom I should not hesitate to call the most righteous man of his time.'

¹ Diogenes mentions three expeditions, the first and the last being in Boeotia. This is impossible. Athenian troops were not serving in Boeotia again until after Plato had passed military age. Aelian, who mentions the same fact, gives more plausibly the two expeditions only. He does not quote his authority.

[Here follow the details of their unsuccessful attempt to force Socrates to implicate himself in their evil activities.] When I saw all this and much else like it, I was indignant and withdrew myself from contact with the evils of that time.

'Not long after this the thirty fell and their whole constitution was upset. And once more, but this time with less urgency, the desire to take part in politics and public work began to draw me. Certainly in those troublous times many things were done at which one would do well to be angry. Indeed, it is not to be wondered at that amidst all these reversals of fortune some people managed to revenge themselves too severely on their enemies. But in general those who returned to power then showed the greatest fairness and moderation. By some chance, however, certain of the ruling men of that time happened to bring this friend and associate of mine, Socrates, to trial, on a most monstrous charge, which, of all people, was the least applicable to Socrates. For they accused him of impiety, and he was condemned and executed for this. . . .'

This is a definite statement, and one which cannot be disregarded. It warrants us in assuming that, whatever interest he may have felt from time to time in philosophy or the arts, his chief interests and ambitions were, at any rate till the death of Socrates, political. Not, of course, that that was incompatible with a lively interest in other matters. We can see from Plato's own dialogues how some of the most politically ambitious young men were ready on occasion to plunge most deeply into a philosophic argument. Indeed, we know incidentally that Plato's philosophical studies at this period extended even beyond what he learnt from Socrates. For we are told by Aristotle, who had every opportunity of being well informed on such a point, that in his youth Plato learnt the doctrines of Heraclitus from a follower of these doctrines, Cratylus. How deep his studies in this philosophy went and how much impression they made on him at the time we cannot tell. He certainly realized to the full the importance of the doctrines taught then at the later period of his life when he was thinking out his own philosophy. But from the picture of Cratylus given in the dialogue called by his name it does not seem likely that his personality made a very deep impression on Plato at the time he knew him.

With Socrates, of course, it was very different. Plato's association with him is one of the best known things about him. And from the account just quoted we can see that at least on two occasions the attitude of the ruling powers of the time to Socrates was the decisive factor in determining Plato's

attitude towards them. What was the nature of Plato's association with Socrates, and what was the effect that it produced on him?

The position of Socrates in Greek thought and the nature of his influence has been a fruitful source of controversy. Some, at any rate, of these controversies can be avoided if we confine ourselves to the question of his influence on Plato, and if, in trying to answer that question, we take as our chief evidence the impressions that we get from Plato's own writings. Of these we find that very few represent Socrates as ever developing a positive and systematic doctrine on any particular point. The great majority represent him as primarily a critical influence, helping others to think out their own views but not producing a positive contribution himself. In a famous passage, he is made to compare himself to a midwife, who can help others to bear their children, but cannot bear herself. The positive lesson that we can draw from his arguments is the absolute necessity for a rigid standard of clear and exact thinking and precision in the use of words, a lesson which is constantly being driven home by a merciless exposure of the confusion and ambiguity of current thought. These first lessons in criticism might well prove a heady wine for young men, and the danger was always present that they might carry away from them nothing but an ability to criticize, which would develop into a contemptuous scepticism about the possibility of any kind of truth or knowledge at all. From this danger those who really understood Socrates were saved by the influence of his personality. His intellectual honesty and clear-sightedness, which made him so dangerous in criticism, were only possible because of the strength with which he held to his ideals and standards of thought. Absolute scepticism could never really move anyone to take the trouble to apply these standards so thoroughly. That could only be the result of a faith that there was a truth to be discovered and that nothing could be more important to us than its discovery. It was the same in the sphere of conduct. His criticism of the confusions of ordinary moral judgements might make some faint hearts begin to doubt the reality of any moral standard. But if anything could still such doubts it would be the spectacle of the very man who first taught them this criticism setting in his own person such an example of how a life could be ruled by an ideal of conduct in the face of all possible difficulties, dangers and temptations. It is perhaps more than

anything else as his ideal of the righteous man that Socrates impressed himself on Plato.

It is much the same picture that is drawn, though with a far inferior art, by Xenophon. He adds an aspect on which Plato does not touch to any extent, namely the extraordinary shrewdness and insight that Socrates showed in the practical affairs of life. He represents it as the regular thing to apply to Socrates for help or advice in any of the ordinary difficulties and problems, professional, personal and even domestic. And those who did thus apply were seldom disappointed. Both accounts emphasize his other qualities, his humour, his kindness, his imperturbable good temper, his friendliness and *bonhomie* to those who knew him. It is altogether a picture that leaves nothing to surprise us in the fact that he was the centre of a circle of devoted friends, who all came in a greater or lesser degree under his influence.

What was the nature of this circle? Perhaps the nearest modern parallel would be the circle that centred round Dr. Johnson. Johnson, indeed, though neither intellectually nor morally quite on the level of Socrates, seems to be the figure with which one would most naturally compare him. At any rate, it seems clear that Plato had no intention of representing this circle as a group of disciples who came to learn any particular doctrine from their master, nor indeed, with one or two very significant exceptions,¹ is there any indication that there was any kind of doctrine or belief that was common to this circle. Nor is it represented as being in any sense a closed body with defined membership. The impression we get is that, as one would expect, there were all sorts of degrees in the intimacy between Socrates and his friends. And yet, once more as we should expect, there are indications that certain people had become tacitly recognized as being to a special degree his intimate friends. Thus, if we can judge from the *Phaedo*, it is noteworthy that certain particular names are mentioned as being among those that one would expect to

¹ The chief exception is the Theory of Ideas, which is spoken of in the *Phaedo* as being a familiar doctrine to all present. This, of course, is one of the chief points on which controversy rages about the extent to which Plato has gone beyond historical fact in the views ascribed to Socrates. On the other hand, it is noticeable that the arguments for the immortality of the soul, though Socrates is represented as producing them on several different occasions, appear on each occasion to come as something new to his hearers, who have to have it proved over again for them from the beginning.

find present at the death scene, and an explanation is evidently thought necessary of why they were not present.

The group seems to have included very different kinds of people, both Athenian citizens and foreigners, and its members seem to have been led by very different motives to their friendship with Socrates. It is possible that some may have been led primarily by a philosophic interest, hoping to get light on the philosophic views and problems that interested them by putting them under the searchlight of Socrates' keen critical mind. Without doubt in every case the motive of personal affection and admiration played a large part, and there seem to have been some for whom this was the main tie that bound them to Socrates. Among these is probably to be numbered his oldest and most intimate friend, Crito, whose picture in the dialogues is one of the most beautiful and delicate pieces of portraiture that Plato gives us. Apollodorus, who narrates the story of the *Symposium*, may have been another such. And, besides these, Socrates seems to have exercised a great attraction on men who were preparing to enter, or had already entered, public life. We can readily imagine how stimulating such men would find a Socratic discussion of the subjects to which they were going to devote their attention. Socrates paid dearly for this influence of his. It is by no means all politicians who like having the foundation of their beliefs examined critically. And, though among Socrates' intimate friends there were men of all political faiths, it was chiefly remembered against him afterwards that they included Alcibiades, Critias and Charmides, who of all men of their time did most evil to their city.

There seems little reason to doubt that, at any rate in Socrates' last years, Plato was in the most intimate circle of his friends. His absence has to be explained in the *Phaedo*, and in the *Apology* he is mentioned as one of the young men who would be likely to have been corrupted by Socrates, if anyone had been. And when he speaks of Socrates in the passage quoted from the Seventh Letter, he speaks of him as his *ἑταῖρος* (translated above, perhaps rather clumsily, as 'friend and associate'), a word which generally implies a rather special relation. It is, indeed, used by Plato himself in the Letters to describe the members of his own school. It therefore seems possible that, so far as there was an 'inner circle' of Socratics—and I have explained above the only sense in which I believe there to have been one—Plato was certainly a member

of it. Further, it is probable, in view of what he tells us of his own early ambitions, that it was to the last-mentioned class of Socrates' associates that he belonged. And Socrates' influence on him, at any rate at this period, seems to have been chiefly moral. It was the righteousness of Socrates that gave him a touchstone by which to judge of politics and institutions and the behaviour of politicians. It was, perhaps, only at a later period and in reminiscence that the intellectual methods and ideals of Socrates began to appear to him as the standard by which to judge of theories and philosophies.

For an account of the mood that he was in after the death of Socrates and the state of mind that developed from this we must turn once more to the Seventh Letter.

'I considered these events,' he writes, 'and the kind of men that were engaged in politics, and the existing laws and customs, and the more I considered and the older I grew, the more difficult did it seem to me to conduct the affairs of the State properly. For it was not possible to effect anything without the aid of friends and associates. And it was not easy to discover such men, even when they existed . . . and it was impossible readily to acquire fresh ones. The laws and customs, also, went on deteriorating to an extraordinary degree. And the effect of all these things on me was this. Whereas at first I had been full of enthusiasm for public work, now I could only look on and watch everything whirling round me this way and that until it made me completely giddy. I did not cease to investigate all possible means of improving these points, and indeed of reforming the whole constitution, while as far as action went I went on awaiting a favourable opportunity. But in the end I came to the conclusion that all the cities of the present age are badly governed. . . . And I was forced to say, praising the true philosophy, that it is from it that we can come to recognize what is right both in public and private affairs. Therefore the race of men will not have respite from evils until either the race of true and genuine philosophers comes to political power or those who exercise power in the cities become by some divine chance real philosophers. This was the idea in my mind on my first arrival in Italy and Sicily.'

This visit, we have been told earlier, took place when he was about forty.

There is thus a period of about ten or twelve years in which Plato's state of mind was as described in this passage. The political interest was still uppermost. But any hopes of immediate action were dead, and buried deeper and deeper as the years went on, and disillusionment grew, not only with